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President's FY 2007 Budget Request for NPS Supports Visitor Services, and Natural, Cultural Resources Stewardship

WASHINGTON—The Bush Administration's proposed Fiscal Year 2007 budget request for the National Park Service is \$2.2 billion, which includes \$1.7 billion in funding for Operation of the National Park System. The funding request for operations reflects a net increase of \$23.4 million over the FY 2006 enacted level.

"This budget request builds on the President's strong commitment to preserving America's national parks and special places," said NPS Director Fran Mainella. "The 2007 budget proposal will enable us to manage and maintain our national parks and the magnificent historic treasures and natural wonders they possess. This request combines fiscal prudence with innovative management approaches and business practices to increase funding for some critical programs such as visitor services and safety, as well as strengthen our natural and cultural resource stewardship programs."

Key elements of the proposed FY 2007 budget include:

Visitor Services and Safety. A funding request of \$1.7 billion for Operation of the National Park System is provided to sustain the current high level of public service. An increase of nearly \$20.6 million over the FY 2006 enacted level is requested for park base operations. Due to continuing strong support from the Administration and Congress, park base funding has risen by \$177 million or 19 percent since FY 2001. These increases will help parks with interpretive ranger programs, staffing at visitor centers, daily maintenance activities, and other programs designed to enhance visitor services. The 2007 budget request also proposes key investments in visitor health and safety, and law enforcement programs:

- \$500,000 is included to place special agents in parks. These park-based special agents will provide investigative support for ranger staffs in parks that extend over large geographic areas, have numerous access points, and are in areas of Federal jurisdiction where State and local agencies may not have the authority, funding, or personnel to perform these services. In addition, \$750,000 is included in the budget request to fund park-based training programs at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, allowing park units to dedicate critical law enforcement funds to on-

the-ground visitor and resource protection programs rather than expend these resources on training.

- \$2.8 million is proposed for high priority police operations, including icon park security and to allow the U.S. Park Police to recruit and train larger officer classes, which is expected to increase the force to 620 sworn officers by the end of 2007 (up from 603 at the beginning of FY 2006).
- \$441,000 is proposed for the NPS Public Health Program, allowing NPS to adequately respond to outbreaks and disease transmission issues, and conduct routine evaluations for safety of food, drinking water, wastewater, and vector-borne disease risks in parks (vector-borne involves the transmission of disease-producing organisms from one host to another). This budget proposal also sustains \$525,000, received through supplemental funding in FY 2006, to support NPS involvement in DOI efforts to address avian influenza.

Natural Resources Stewardship. The 2007 budget request includes a \$2.4 million increase to fund NPS commitments under the National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000, which directs the NPS and Federal Aviation Administration to work collaboratively to develop commercial air tour management plans for all parks where this activity occurs. These plans will assist resource managers in preventing or minimizing adverse impacts on natural soundscapes and visitor experiences. Additional proposed investments include:

- \$1.0 million to complete a system of 32 networks throughout the National Park System to identify the “Vital Signs” (measurable naturally occurring features) of 272 natural resource parks. Inventory and monitoring networks group parks sharing similar geographic and natural resource characteristics. These networks share and coordinate fieldwork, staff, equipment, and business practices leading to successful new partnerships with universities and researchers through Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units and Research Learning Centers. This system of networks enables park managers to apply good science to resource management to maintain and restore the extraordinary natural heritage found in national parks.
- \$750,000 to enhance existing exotic plant management teams to address severe damage caused by invasive species to natural resources and the economy. These teams will operate in three priority geo-regional areas—South Florida, the Northern Great Plains, and the Rio Grande River Basin.

Cultural Resources Stewardship. The 2007 budget proposal would focus resources for the Preserve America, Save America’s Treasures, and Heritage Partnerships programs into a unified \$32.2 million American Heritage and Preservation Partnership. Under the umbrella of the President’s Preserve America Initiative, these programs will improve coordination and allow for greater efficiencies in meeting the Administration’s goals for enhancing and expanding opportunities for cultural resource preservation throughout the Nation. Other proposed investments include:

- \$1.0 million to initiate a full-time professional effort, incorporating 10 term/contractor positions, to provide complete, accurate, and reliable information concerning cultural landscapes, and historic and prehistoric structures. This increase will enable the NPS to make significant progress toward updating the Cultural Landscapes Inventory and the List of Classified Structures (Historic and Prehistoric) in FY 2007.

- \$39.7 million for Historic Preservation Fund matching grants to States, Territories, and Tribes to preserve historically and culturally significant sites.

Enhancing the NPS Asset Management Program. The FY 2007 budget request will increase the Administration's investment to \$5.6 billion (from FY 2002 to FY 2007) for addressing the NPS deferred maintenance backlog with an increase of \$10.0 million in the cyclic maintenance program, resulting in a total of \$393.5 million for facility maintenance. This amount, together with construction funding totaling \$229.3 million, provides \$622.8 million for construction and facility maintenance in 2007.

These investments have enabled NPS to make significant improvements in the condition of critical facilities and other assets that serve visitors and protect park resources. In addition to making significant improvements, NPS is transforming the agency's approach to managing and addressing its deferred maintenance backlog. During the past four years, NPS has been implementing the initial phase of an innovative asset management program focused on developing, for the first time, a comprehensive inventory and condition assessment of the agency's asset base, which includes everything from nearly 18,000 buildings to approximately 15,000 miles of paved and unpaved roads. Condition assessments on eight industry-standard assets (such as buildings, water systems, roads and trails) will be completed at all parks by the end of 2006. Parks also have completed, for the first time, a prioritization of their asset inventory. This shift in emphasis for the agency is based on management reforms and performance measures, and features a state-of-the-art software system. These new tools will allow NPS to have a better understanding of the true cost of ownership, including recurring operational costs of the built environment found in parks.

NPS also will be able to refine budget estimates and identify maintenance needs based on the actual condition of facilities, and identify the resources needed to bring the highest priority assets to an acceptable condition. Because of the Service's current approach to managing deferred maintenance, managers have a better understanding of both the quantity and condition of park assets, and renewed credibility when discussing park needs and accomplishments.

The FY 2007 budget request assumes an investment of \$210.0 million from the Highway Trust Fund for park roads and parkways, building on progress already made in improving road conditions. The budget proposal also calls for using additional recreation fee revenues for facility maintenance projects.

This budget proposal supports the agency's new focus on protecting and maintaining existing assets rather than funding new construction projects.

Land Acquisition. The FY 2007 request includes \$22.7 million for the NPS portion of the Federal land acquisition program. Included within the proposal is \$5.0 million to acquire land to preserve for future generations a site that honors the passengers and crew of Flight 93, who gave their lives thwarting a planned attack on Washington, D.C., on Sept. 11, 2001. The request also includes \$4.0 million to provide grants to States and local communities to preserve and protect Civil War battlefield sites. Matching funds for Civil War battlefield sites are anticipated to generate an additional \$4 million for preservation. This budget request reiterates a proposal to terminate funding for State assistance grants. As the Administration strives to trim the Federal deficit, focusing on

core Federal agency responsibilities is imperative. Paying for improvements to State and local parks is a decision better left to State and local taxpayers rather than Federal taxpayers.

Improving Concessions Management and Contract Oversight. A total of \$911,000 is requested in the FY 2007 budget to improve concessions contracting oversight so NPS can achieve its program goals of reducing the contracting backlog and effectively managing the concessions program.

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